

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2009

Remarks Prior to a Meeting With Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany
November 3, 2009

President Obama. Hello, everybody. Well, I'm just going to make a brief statement. I am thrilled to have Chancellor Merkel here today. I want to congratulate her again for her victory in her recent election, the formation of a Government, and we are honored to have her visit the Oval Office.

But the main reason she's here is that a great honor has been bestowed upon her. She is going to be the first German Chancellor in 50 years to address Congress, the first Chancellor ever to address a joint session of Congress. And it is, I think, a very appropriate honor that's been bestowed on Chancellor Merkel. Obviously, the alliance between the United States and Germany has been an extraordinary pillar of the transatlantic relationship.

We are now moving towards the 20th anniversary of the Berlin Wall coming down and Germany being reunified after so many painful years. And this is a special moment for Chancellor Merkel, as somebody who grew up in East Germany, who understands what it's like to be under the shadow of a dictatorial regime, and to see how freedom has bloomed in Germany, how it has become the centerpiece for a extraordinarily strong European Union.

I think all of these things converge, and we are very pleased that she's going to be here to spread her view of what's taking place in the world, the many challenges we face, to Members of Congress and the American people.

I should just note that Germany has been an extraordinarily strong ally on a whole host of international issues. We appreciate the sacrifices of German soldiers in Afghanistan and our common work there to bring peace and stability to Afghanistan and to create the environment in which the Afghan people themselves can provide for their own security.

Chancellor Merkel has been an extraordinary leader on the issue of climate change. And the United States, Germany, and countries around the world, I think, are all beginning to recognize why it is so important that we work in common in order to stem the potential catastrophe that could result if we continue to see global warming continuing unabated.

And on economic issues, on issues like nuclear proliferation, consistently I found Chancellor Merkel to be thoughtful, to be energetic, and to have a strong vision of how we can move forward in the future.

So I am very pleased to be working with her as a partner. We are thankful, Chancellor, for your leadership not just in Europe but around the world. And I'm looking forward to many more years in which the American people and the German people are working together to expand the boundaries of freedom and to create prosperity for ordinary men and women on both sides of the Atlantic.

So thank you so much for coming.

Chancellor Merkel. Thank you.

President Obama. Thank you.

[At this point, Chancellor Merkel spoke in German.]

President Obama. I think what she said was good. [*Laughter*] I'm teasing.

[*Chancellor Merkel's remarks were translated by an interpreter as follows.*]

Chancellor Merkel. First of all, I would like to thank you very much for the opportunity to be able to be here again today. I would also like to say that it is, obviously, a very great honor for me to address today the joint session of the—of Congress, both Houses of Congress, as it were.

But I'm also very much looking forward to having an exchange of view with the President again. We have always had very intensive discussions, and we're going to have those today again on issues that are of mutual interest to us and that we have been working on almost daily. We are working and discussing issues, for example, related to climate change, Afghanistan, Iran, and, obviously, also the world economic situation.

But I wanted to use this opportunity today also to express our gratitude, my gratitude, to the American people for the support that the American people have given us throughout the process leading up to German reunification, and I think it is something that I would like to later on say it very clearly also in my speech to both Houses of Congress. And let me tell you, it is something that we, the Germans, shall never forget.

President Obama. All right, thank you guys.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:14 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. Chancellor Merkel spoke in German, and her remarks were translated by an interpreter.

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